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WORLD'S LARGEST ALUMINUM PLANT UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN EASTERN SIBERIA

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WORLD'S LARGEST ALUMINUM PLANT UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN EASTERN SIBERIA

The largest aluminum plant in the world is under construction near Bratsk in Eastern Siberia, according to information obtained by a US delegation that recently toured industrial installations in the USSR. The Bratsk plant apparently is scheduled to have a capacity of 800,000 to 900,000 metric tons (mt) of aluminum per year, which is twice the annual output of the world's largest existing smelter located in Canada and almost equal to current annual production of aluminum in the USSR. Initial production, estimated at 50,000 to 70,000 mt, is scheduled for 1964 and full operation for 1967. Although initial production probably will not be achieved before 1965 and full production not until some time after 1970, construction of the Bratsk plant is evidence of Soviet intentions to continue the rapid expansion of the aluminum industry, particularly in the eastern regions, where the supply of low-cost electric power will be abundant.

Construction of an aluminum plant near Bratsk to take advantage of low-cost power in the area was first considered at least 7 years ago. 1/ A proposal to build the plant during the Seven Year Plan (1959-65) evidently was rejected in 1959, in part because of the necessity of shipping in alumina, the other major input, along with electric power, from the Urals or farther west. 2/ This decision was subsequently reversed, however, for articles appeared in the Soviet press in August 1961 stating that planning was underway for construction of the "world's largest" aluminum plant at Anzeba, near Bratsk. 3/ Preparatory stages of construction work apparently began about December 1961. 4/ At the time of the visit by the US delegation in September 1962, construction of the first section was reported to be underway. 5/

The US delegates were told that the plant eventually would use 16 billion kilowatt-hours (kwh) per year, 6/ which would be sufficient to support an annual production of 800,000 to 900,000 mt of aluminum. This power requirement will be supplied through a power transmission network

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including the Bratsk hydroelectric powerplant, the Ust'-Ilimskaya hydroelectric powerplant, and the Krasnoyarsk hydroelectric powerplant. Although the Bratsk powerplant may supply the electric power for the first section of the aluminum plant in 1964 or 1965, the bulk of the power requirements of the plant probably will be met by the Ust'-Ilimskaya powerplant, 7/ which will go into operation in 1967 or 1968. Also, power from the Krasnoyarsk hydroelectric powerplant may be available, 8/ possibly as early as 1966.

No information is as yet available about sources of alumina, but the most likely sources are the refineries in the Urals region initially and those at Achinsk and Pavlodar, now under construction, later on. Construction of a local refinery for processing either the bauxite of the Bokson deposits in the Buryat Mongolian ASSR or other low-quality ores has been proposed but is not anticipated until possibly after the current Seven Year Plan.

The most modern technology available is to be used at the Bratsk aluminum plant. Reduction cells to be installed (described as very large 9/) probably are the 150,000-ampere type, rather than the 120,000-ampere to 130,000-ampere type being installed in most new reduction lines. Also, mechanization and automation is to be applied extensively, 10/ doubtless partly because of the anticipated shortages in labor supply, a continuing problem in the eastern regions.

Construction of the Bratsk aluminum plant does not appear to represent a significant revision of the goal for production of aluminum under the current Seven Year Plan. The delegates were told that the first section is to be in operation by 1964 and that the plant is to be completed by 1967. 11/ On the basis of knowledge of other Soviet aluminum plants, it is estimated that the first section of the new plant will produce 50,000 to 70,000 mt of aluminum. As the goal for production of aluminum in 1965 is 2.8 to 3.0 times output in 1958, or estimated production of 1.4 million to 1.5 million mt, the scheduling of production at Bratsk for 1964 is an indication that Soviet planners now are aiming at the higher figure.

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Plans to complete the first section in 1964, however, appear to be optimistic. Favoring early completion is the presence nearby of a large supply of construction labor and equipment belonging to Bratskgesstroy, an organization that will soon complete work on the huge Bratsk hydroelectric powerplant. Units of Bratskgesstroy have been assigned the task of constructing the smelter. 12/ A second factor is that the smelter has been declared to be "most important" 13/ and consequently probably will be favored in the allocation of construction materials and production equipment. Nevertheless, because the project is in very early stages of construction and the planned time period is so short and because long construction periods are the rule rather than the exception in the eastern regions of the USSR, the chances that production at the Bratsk smelter will be initiated by 1964 are judged to be only fair. Attainment of first production by 1965 is judged to be more likely. Furthermore, attainment of the level of 800,000 to 900,000 mt is likely to occur some time after 1970 rather than in 1967. Completion of the plant after 1970 would coincide roughly with full operation of the Ust'-Ilimskaya hydroelectric powerplant and would be more consistent with estimates of the demand and supply of electric power in the area during the next decade.

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